

COVID-19

GNWP Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy and Appeal

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gnwp Global Network
of Women
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COVID-19: GNWP Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy and Appeal

On 11 March, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) characterized the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), which originated in Wuhan province, China in December 2019, and spread across all continents since, as a pandemic.¹ Pandemics are “large-scale outbreaks of infectious disease that can greatly increase morbidity and mortality over a wide geographic area and cause significant economic, social, and political disruption.”² Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has already caused “major economic disruption”, including spikes in unemployment from the United States³ to New Zealand⁴. The economic impact is also expected to affect the most vulnerable populations living in low- and middle-income countries.⁵

Experts predict that the COVID-19 emergency is just the first of many, as evidence shows that the spike in global travel, urbanization and exploitation of the natural environment are factors contributing to the spread of pandemics.⁶ There is a need for significant policy adaptation to improve global disaster preparedness, management, and response. This adaptation and mitigation strategy summarizes the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders’ (GNWP) policies in the face of COVID-19 outbreak. It also identifies critical recommendations for global and national stakeholders to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis without sacrificing peace and the safety of their citizens, continue supporting the work of women and youth peacebuilders, as well as increase the preparedness and prevent similar crises in the future.

¹ World Health Organization, “WHO Director-General’s opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19”, 11 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>. Accessed on 27 March 2020.

² Madhav N, Oppenheim B, Gallivan M, et al., “Pandemics: Risks, Impacts, and Mitigation”. In: Jamison DT, Gelband H, Horton S, et al., ed., “Disease Control Priorities: Improving Health and Reducing Poverty”, 3rd edition, Washington (DC): The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2017. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK525302/>. Accessed on 27 March 2020.

³ “Record 3.3m Americans file for unemployment as the US tries to contain Covid-19”, The Guardian, 26 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/mar/26/us-unemployment-rate-coronavirus-business> Accessed on 27 March 2020.

⁴ “Covid-19 epidemic could take unemployment from 4 to 30 percent – economists”, RNZ, 26 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/412638/covid-19-epidemic-could-take-unemployment-from-4-to-30-percent-economists>. Accessed on 27 March 2020.

⁵ Evans, David and Over, Mead, “The Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Low- and Middle-Income Countries”, Center for Global Development, 12 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/economic-impact-covid-19-low-and-middle-income-countries>. Accessed on 27 March 2020.

⁶ Madhav N, Oppenheim B, Gallivan M, et al., “Pandemics: Risks, Impacts, and Mitigation”. In: Jamison DT, Gelband H, Horton S, et al., ed., “Disease Control Priorities: Improving Health and Reducing Poverty”, 3rd edition, Washington (DC): The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2017. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK525302/>. Accessed on 27 March 2020.



Gendered Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has a disproportionate impact on women and girls. The mandatory isolation and social distancing policies have aggravated domestic violence, as they trap women at home with their abusers, while women's shelters and domestic violence hotlines are struggling to meet demand.⁷ As primary caretakers for the sick and elderly, women face greater risk of exposure to COVID-19. Additionally, women "comprise the majority of health and social care workers, and are on the front lines of the fight against COVID-19."⁸ Finally, the outbreak has led to an increase in the unpaid domestic labor burden on women, including childcare as schools and nurseries have closed.⁹

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is further exacerbated by armed conflict, ongoing violence, and humanitarian emergencies. While thus far the number of COVID-19 cases in displaced settings has been low, refugees and internally displaced persons remain at an extremely high risk.¹⁰ The travel and mobility restrictions have severely inhibited the delivery of essential services and humanitarian aid to vulnerable groups, including women, young women and girls, people with disabilities, IDPs, and refugees.¹¹

For example, in the southern region of Mindanao, the Philippines where more than 300,00 people are displaced due to ongoing armed conflict or natural disaster, local aid groups are attempting to continue implementing cash aid programs, despite staff being quarantined or isolated as COVID-19 cases rise.¹² Furthermore, health systems in war-torn countries have reached "the point of total collapse, while the few health workers who remain are also seen as targets" of non-state armed groups, violent extremists, and the military.¹³ According to GNWP's local partners on the ground, the restricted mobility due to the COVID-19 prevention measures can aggravate the situation for the communities in conflict-affected regions, such as Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Some of these communities have already faced challenges in accessing other parts of the country.

⁷ Mélissa Godin, "As Cities Around the World Go on Lockdown, Victims of Domestic Violence Look for a Way Out", Time Magazine, 18 March 2020. Available at: https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/?fbclid=IwAR04Wwz5Q-xRLjPAzFI99mJmoYk5u_ktklO7xbXMLwYOnKEM6uiRUh3719U. Accessed on 27 March 2020. Accessed on 31 March 2020.

⁸ Rosamund Hutt, "The coronavirus fallout may be worse for women than men. Here's why", World Economic Forum, 12 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/the-coronavirus-fallout-may-be-worse-for-women-than-men-heres-why/>. Accessed on 27 March 2020.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Jacob Kurtzer, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Humanitarian Crises", Center for Strategic and International Studies, 19 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/impact-covid-19-humanitarian-crises>. Accessed on 27 March 2020.

¹¹ CARE International, "Gender implications of COVID-19 outbreaks in development and humanitarian settings", 16 March 2020. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/gender-implications-covid-19-outbreaks-development-and-humanitarian-settings>. Accessed on 27 March 2020.

¹² The New Humanitarian, "Coronavirus and aid: What we're watching", 26 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/03/26/coronavirus-humanitarian-aid-response#Asia>. Accessed on 1 April 2020.

¹³ UN News "COVID-19: UN chief calls for global ceasefire to focus on 'the true fight of our lives'", 23 March 2020. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059972>. Accessed on 1 April 2020.



In Georgia, a checkpoint between the country and South Ossetia was closed in September 2019, which has made access to information, medical supplies and food challenging, especially for the elderly. When first cases of COVID-19 were announced, all other checkpoints were also closed, making the flow of aid and information impossible.¹⁴ In Gali, Abkhazia, doctors do not have access to sufficient protective equipment and hygiene products. The Georgian government opened a hospital dedicated to COVID-19 patients from Abkhazia in the neighboring Zugdidi municipality, but civil society has expressed concerns over the guaranteeing safe transport of patients through the checkpoints.¹⁵

Women Peacebuilders and COVID-19

In the current crisis, the role of civil society and women peacebuilders is more critical than ever. They are key actors in preventing the spread of the pandemics and mitigating its negative effects on women and girls in conflict-affected countries. Local civil society organizations and women's rights groups that have a close and direct relationship with communities are best placed to raise awareness, communicate accurate information, counter rumors, provide essential services, and liaise with government during the emergency.¹⁶

COVID-19 has disrupted the work of many civil society organizations who work to promote and protect women's rights, build inclusive and sustainable peace, and implement Women and Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth and Peace and Security (YPS) resolutions at the local, national, regional, and global levels. Women peacebuilders – including GNWP and its members around the world – have seen their work curbed by the mobility and travel restrictions and suspension of grants, leaving them and the communities they work with, gripped by uncertainty. The digital divide for grassroots women peacebuilders contributes to their inability to work online, participate in online meetings and conference calls, or access the internet, as some Ukrainian women's rights activists shared with GNWP.¹⁷ Additionally, the 64th session on the Commission on the Status of Women, ECOSOC Youth Forum, Peacebuilding Architecture Review, amongst many other urgent, important high-level meetings were cancelled or postponed indefinitely. These meetings provide important avenues and advocacy opportunities for local women and youth peacebuilders. Moreover, women's organizations are facing the threat of dwindling resources, as many donors have re-directed their funds towards the governments to support emergency response.¹⁸

¹⁴ Civil.ge, "Fearing Coronavirus, Tskhinvali Closes All Crossing Points", 27 February 2020. Available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/340276>. Accessed 2 April 2020.

¹⁵ information provided by GNWP local members and partners via email on April 2, 2020.

¹⁶ World Health Organization, "Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response: A WHO Guidance Document" Geneva, 2009. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK143067/>. Accessed 28 March 2020.

¹⁷ Information provided by GNWP local members and partners via email between March 23 and 30, 2020.

¹⁸ Phone interview with GNWP partners in Moldova, 6 April 2020.



Nonetheless, **women and youth peacebuilders continue their work in the face of COVID-19.** Many of GNWP's partners and other women rights organizations have modified their implementation strategies to address the pandemic and its gendered impact. In Armenia, Georgia, Indonesia, Kenya, Moldova, the Philippines, Uganda and Ukraine, women and youth peacebuilders are making face masks and distributing them along with food packages and hygiene products, to the elderly, people with disabilities, and vulnerable populations. In Kenya and the Philippines, in addition to the food packs, face masks, dignity kits (that contain sanitary pads, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, disinfectant, isopropyl alcohol) are distributed to women and girls in IDP camps and rural communities. In Kenya and Uganda, women are translating information about COVID-19 to local languages and distributing the information through text messages and radio. In Ukraine, women civil society have set up a phone and text network wherein they make phone calls or send text messages to women who are vulnerable to physical, mental, and emotional abuse to let them know that support is available. A lot of times, just listening and talking to the women who are in abusive relationships already make a big difference—especially in these times of isolation.¹⁹ **Despite their contributions, women and youth peacebuilders remain marginalized in the crisis and excluded in the decision-making on the response.** This can lead to responses that are not gender- and peace-sensitive and do not address the needs of the most vulnerable.²⁰

GNWP calls on global decision-makers to **strengthen their efforts to ensure that achievements in conflict resolution, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding and women's participation in these processes do not regress; and that inclusive and sustainable peace does not become a casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic.** In this light, we welcome and appreciate the UN Secretary-General's message urging warring parties across the world to lay down their weapons in support of the common, more pressing fight against COVID-19.²¹ We also call on the warring parties such as governments, military, and non-state armed groups to respect the ceasefire agreement in their own countries. GNWP in partnership with local women's rights organizations and CSOs is also monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the ceasefire agreements. We encourage other CSOs and the media to do the same. The ceasefires will allow humanitarian and development actors and peacebuilders to reach vulnerable populations, provide life-saving relief services and critical information to stop the spread of COVID-19.

¹⁹ All above information has been provided by GNWP local members and partners via email between March 23 and 30, 2020.

²⁰ Phone interview with GNWP partners in Moldova, 6 April 2020.

²¹ UN News "COVID-19: UN chief calls for global ceasefire to focus on 'the true fight of our lives'", 23 March 2020. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059972>. Accessed on 1 April 2020.



How is GNWP responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected GNWP's program implementation at the local, national, regional and global levels, due to restrictions on travels and group gatherings, as well as health and safety concerns for the staff, implementation partners and supporters, as well as the general public. In the face of the global COVID-19 pandemic, GNWP has adopted a number of mitigation and adaptation strategies. GNWP is also proactively identifying opportunities to continue its peacebuilding work, and support local women and youth peacebuilders' efforts to address the impacts of the crisis on local communities and prevent escalation or outbreak of conflicts.

We have developed and are currently implementing this **mitigation and adaptation strategy informed by a gender-responsive conflict and crisis analysis. This strategy will be continuously updated based on our global monitoring of the COVID-19 crisis.**

- 1. GNWP staff are working remotely and following self-isolation and social distancing policies.**
- 2. All domestic and international travel is put on hold until further notice to ensure health and safety of GNWP staff, implementation partners and supporters, as well as the general public.**
- 3. All in-person workshops, conferences, meetings, interviews, focus group discussions and trainings that have been planned for April to June 2020 are postponed until further notice.** This is also to ensure high-quality of activities, which requires extensive preparatory work and advocacy to mobilize political support and participation. Due to restrictions imposed by national governments, GNWP partners are not able to travel or meet with stakeholders to conduct this preparatory work and advocacy.
- 4. Some of the in-person activities identified in #3 are now organized online whenever possible,** but the online meetings are a complement, rather than a substitute for the in-country implementation. GNWP has been making effective use of the existing technological platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Zoom and Voiceboxer to stay closely in touch with its local partners and planning to organize online meetings with women and youth in conflict-affected areas. For example, GNWP has been organizing online meetings with women and youth peacebuilders in Bangladesh, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Ukraine.²² These platforms allow GNWP and its partners to exchange updated information, raise awareness and counter fake news related to the COVID-19.

²² Some of these have already taken place, while others are planned for the coming weeks.

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5. **GNWP remains in close communication with its local partners to jointly monitor the crisis and its impact on project implementation generally and its impact on women and girls in conflict-affected situations specifically.** We are also monitoring and reporting on the implementation of national and regional ceasefire agreements.
 6. **GNWP is currently developing country/community-specific crisis and risk management and advocacy strategies²³ with its local members and partners.** One of the components of these strategies that will be prioritized is the crisis and risk communication strategies targeted at conflict-affected communities. In partnership with local and national women's rights groups and other CSOs and media, GNWP will organize crisis and risk communication strategy workshops to develop a systematic crisis and risk communication strategy and disseminate information, education and communication (IEC) materials that would raise awareness of COVID-19 particularly in conflict-affected local communities and prevent it from spreading. Print, audio, and audio-visual materials will be produced in local languages to make them accessible to local populations.

A new way of working with local women and youth peacebuilders:

1. **GNWP is gathering information about the ongoing initiatives of women peacebuilders to the COVID-19 outbreak** in their respective countries, to showcase them and generate support so they could be sustained, encourage others to replicate them, and appeal to donors and international development partners for support. Some of such initiatives are featured in this blog: <https://bit.ly/2QOWBFE>
2. **GNWP is reaching out, coordinating, and advocating with its donors** to request flexibility in their current grants and appeal for the establishment of rapid response funding mechanisms for local peacebuilders and first responders.
3. **GNWP is providing technical, financial, and capacity building to its local partners**, including the members of its Young Women for Peace and Leadership program to support their work to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and address its impacts in vulnerable and conflict-affected communities. In addition to calling for rapidly accessible small grants from donor countries, GNWP has launched an

²³ It is the primary responsibility of governments to respond to crisis and disasters, and guarantee the safety, security, and wellbeing of their citizens. However, when governments do not have a presence in certain areas including conflict-affected communities, civil society take on the task of crisis and disaster management including dissemination of information to prevent the crisis from aggravating and reduce the risks that local populations face. In situations, where the government is performing but there is a room for improvement, crisis and risk management strategies will be turned into advocacy strategies.



online fundraising campaign to support the efforts of young women at the frontlines of COVID-19 emergency.

These mitigation and adaptation strategies will evolve as we continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 in conflict-affected areas, where GNWP works. GNWP will modify these strategies in close consultation with our local partners—women and youth peacebuilders on the ground to better address the impact of the COVID-19 emergency as we continue our work in conflict resolution, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and sustaining peace.

Our Appeal

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, we call on the UN, Member States, donor community, non-state armed groups, armed forces and all parties to conflict to:

- 1. Take measures to protect peace and prevent aggravation of conflicts**
 - a. Support and uphold the call of the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for an immediate global ceasefire.** The ceasefire will allow humanitarians, development workers, and peacebuilders to reach local populations in the conflict affected countries who are most vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. So far, several armed groups and Member States – including in Colombia²⁴, Cameroon, the Philippines²⁵, and Yemen²⁶ declared a ceasefire.
 - b. Ensure that responses to COVID-19 are proportionate, and founded on human rights principles and feminist values wherein the needs of the most vulnerable take primacy.** Police and military can play important roles in supporting the preventative measures, protecting those most vulnerable, and helping to deliver food, medicine and other life-saving goods and services to remote areas. **However, we urge decision-makers not to allow the COVID-19 emergency to be used for disproportionate and unjustified use of government powers including those of the police and military, which puts the most vulnerable at a greater risk and contributes to a culture of violence.**

²⁴ BBC, “Colombia’s ELN rebels call ceasefire over coronavirus”, 30 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-52090169>. Accessed on 1 April 2020.

²⁵ Irwin Loy, “In the news: Peace and the pandemic”, The New Humanitarian, 27 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/03/27/philippines-cameroon-coronavirus-ceasefire>. Accessed on 1 April 2020.

²⁶ Middle East Monitor, “Warring parties agree to ceasefire in war-torn Yemen amid coronavirus”, 30 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200330-warring-parties-agree-to-ceasefire-in-war-torn-yemen-amid-coronavirus/>. Accessed on 1 April 2020.



2. Ensure responses to COVID-19 are gender-sensitive and inclusive

- a. **Integrate gender-analysis and use sex- and age-disaggregated data in the design and implementation of crisis and disaster response.** Ensure that grassroots women and youth peacebuilders meaningfully participate in the development, design, and implementation of these crisis and disaster responses.
- b. **Ensure equitable access to essential health services, test kits, and treatment for COVID-19, particularly in grassroots conflict-affected communities.** Women should still have timely access to sexual health and reproductive services, such as emergency contraception and safe abortion.
- c. **Protect and sustain the delivery of essential services and humanitarian aid to refugees and internally displaced persons.** Adopt human-rights oriented protocols to reduce the spread of the virus.
- d. **Address the digital divide and gender gap within that divide** to enable the use technologies and platforms that are accessible, affordable, inclusive and participatory and at the same time not harmful to the environment. This will help ensure women and youth peacebuilders' advocacy for gender-responsive, conflict and crisis-sensitive interventions is sustained.

3. Review funding policies and mechanisms to adapt to the new reality, shaped by the COVID-19 emergency

- a. **Provide flexible, reliable, and rapidly-accessible funding for grassroots women and youth organizations who are at the frontlines of addressing COVID-19.**
- b. **Allow flexibility in reporting on existing grants to civil society organizations experiencing delays in implementation plans.**
- c. **Invest in bridging the digital divide for grassroots women in conflict affected communities** by expanding access to free internet, cell phone airtime and computers in order for them to access information and participate in online discussions on the response to the COVID 19 crisis.
- d. **Encourage and fund educational campaigns which promote equitable sharing of domestic tasks and condemn domestic violence.**

4. Re-evaluate global priorities in the long-run

- a. **Shift the funds from the multi-billion military industry to medical research, peacebuilding, humanitarian action, and development.**
- b. **Ensure that when Covid-19 vaccine is developed, it will be produced generically and widely accessible,** including to the elderly, women and other high-risk and vulnerable groups.